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Captivity and Culture: Insights from the Desert Storm Prisoner of War Experience

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As an Advanced Research Project

A paper submitted to the Director of the Advanced Research Department in the Center for Naval Warfare Studies in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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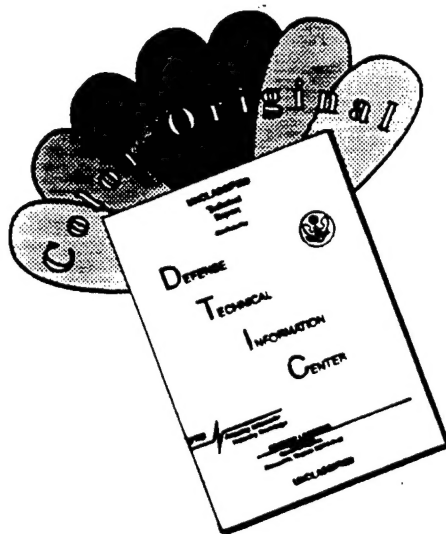
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To RPA

Whose bravery and brilliance is matched by few men.

A POW held by people whose cultural habits are unknown to him
is as surely confined by this ignorance as he is by barbed wire and armed guards.

William K. Carr
"The Faceless POW"

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Abstract

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Though the small size of the Desert Storm POW group limits the scope and the strength of conclusions that can be unequivocally supported by this survey analysis, two important findings are highlighted. First, knowledge of the culture of an enemy appears to offer survival benefits for a prisoner of war. The degree of benefit that can be derived from cultural knowledge varies inversely with the intensity of the situation that the captive is experiencing. Cultural knowledge is of greater survival benefit during the long-term phase of captivity rather than during the initial period of capture shock. Second, the value of the arduous tests which SERE training provides was strongly reinforced by those Desert Storm POWs who had received such training.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 CAPTIVITY AND CULTURE

Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Historical Observations	2
The War of 1812	2
World War I	3
World War II	4
Korean War	6
Vietnam War	9
The Gulf War	10

CHAPTER 2 COMPONENTS OF POW CULTURE

The Culture of Captivity	12
Capture Shock	12
Long-term Captivity	14

CHAPTER 3 THE DESERT STORM POW SURVEY

Objective	17
Survey Construction	18
Distribution and Response	19

Cohort Characteristics	20
Problem Areas	21
CHAPTER 4	
DESERT STORM SURVEY ANALYSIS	
SERE Training	23
Survival Training and POW Literature	25
Cultural training	26
Cultural Knowledge and Captivity Experiences	28
Length of Captivity	29
Before ... After ... Future	30
CHAPTER 5	
CULTURAL TRAINING	
Focus	31
The Double-edged Scimitar	31
Linkage between SERE and Cultural Training	33
Training Levels	34
Training Resources	35
The Chair of Comparative Cultures	37
CHAPTER 6	
CONCLUSIONS	
Conclusions and Discussion	40
APPENDIX A	42
APPENDIX B	54
WORKS CITED	56

CHAPTER 1

CAPTIVITY AND CULTURE

Introduction

War is a clash of cultures—religions, nations, ethnic groups. Sometimes the differences between the warring parties are slight; often, there are vast cultural chasms. In the impersonal and distant engagements that characterize modern warfare, the enemy is perceived and described in terms of a weapon or its delivery platform—the tank, the missile, the aircraft, the submarine. Though the features of the opposition's hardware may be well known, the personal characteristics of the enemy may not be understood. For the average combatant, such ignorance may not be a concern. For those who become prisoners of war, lack of knowledge of the enemy's culture, language and politics may be a handicap in surviving a grim situation.

Purpose

This study addresses the influence of cultural knowledge on adaptation to captivity and survival as a prisoner of war (POW). It also examines the effect of cultural differences on the relationship between a POW and his captor. The question of whether culture-specific knowledge is helpful to a POW is explored. The observations and opinions of the Desert Storm POWs who participated in the survey, which is central to this work, are evaluated in order to answer the question, "Does knowledge of the opposing culture improve adaptability and survivability for a

prisoner of war?" The collected insights of the Desert Storm POWs provide an assessment of past training and lead to suggestions for future training to improve the survival of POWs.

Historical Observations

Accounts by and about prisoners of war have appeared after every major conflict. They supply continuing testimony to two great themes—the inhumanity of man and the resilience of men. In the following pages, brief excerpts from the vast body of prisoner of war and hostage literature are offered in support of the idea that adaptability to imprisonment is dependent, in part, upon the culture of the captive and the culture of the captor. Treatment of the prisoner of war is also culturally driven. The more diverse two cultures are the more difficult it seems to be for the combatants to identify and respond to the similarities in each other's human condition.

The War of 1812

One of the earliest published accounts of an American prisoner of war was a privately printed treatise authored by a prisoner of the British during the War of 1812. The author wrote extensive and vivid descriptions about every aspect of the privations and desperate conditions that he encountered. He noted that there was a distinct difference in the behaviors and ability to adjust to prison life between the Americans and the French:

At the market, the French prisoners carry on a great traffic. They buy and sell, and are, apparently, as happy as if they were not imprisoned. But the Americans are not so;—they long for that land of liberty, so dear to them, and sigh for their distant home.¹

¹[Charles Andrews], The Prisoners' Memoirs, or Dartmoor Prison; Containing a Complete and Impartial History of The Entire Captivity of the Americans in England, from the Commencement of the Last War between the United States and Great Britain, until All Prisoners Were Released by the Treaty of Ghent. (New York: Privately printed, 1852), 13.

As the following passage suggests, the American observer was awed by the ability of the French to carry out extensive and profitable commercial activity while prisoners of war.

In the six prisons, occupied by the French prisoners, is carried on almost every branch of the mechanic arts. . . . They manufactured shoes, hats, hair and bone-work. . . . They forged notes on the Bank of England . . . and made so perfect an imitation, that the cashier could not discover the forgery. . . . Whether they are constituted by nature to endure hardships, or so long confinement has got them wonted to live in prisons, I will not venture to say; but they really seem easy under it, live well, and make money to lay up. . . .²

Apparently, the Americans did not adapt well enough to the harsh conditions to undertake commercial ventures as a sideline to imprisonment. The author remarked that, “. . . the Americans have not that careless volatility, like the cockle in the fable, to sing and dance when their house is on fire over them.”³ These observations suggest that two distinct cultural groups reacted to the same conditions in a different manner.

World War I

The following poem was written by a British soldier. It illustrates the conflicting sentiments occurring in a captor who observes the enemy in a defeated state. His desire for revenge is tempered by empathy for the wretched German prisoners.

GERMAN PRISONERS

When first I saw you in the curious street
Like some platoon of soldier ghosts in grey,
My mad impulse was all to smite and slay,
To spit upon you—tread you ‘neath my feet.
But when I saw how each sad soul did greet
My gaze with no sign of defiant frown,

²Ibid., 28.

³Ibid., 29.

How each face showed the pale flag of defeat,
And doubt, despair and disillusionment,
And how were grievous wounds on many a head,
And on your garb red-faced was other red;
And how you stooped as men whose strength was spent,
I knew that we had suffered each as other,
And could have grasped your hand and cried,
"My brother!"⁴

When cultural comparisons are made, the differences between the British and the Germans prove to be quite small. "Physical characteristics are similar, and the English language is derived in part from German and its ancestor languages."⁵ Their philosophical roots originate in ancient Greece and a Christian value system is prevalent in both cultures.⁶ Empathy is easier to achieve when individuals can identify closely with a victim. If the British soldier's enemy had been Asian or Arabic, it is less likely that a poem which reflected an equal degree of compassion for the men, "my brothers," would have been written.

World War II

The Second World War was the first major conflict in which the 1929 Geneva Convention agreements⁷ on the treatment of prisoners of war applied. One of the greatest

⁴Joseph Lee, German Prisoners in A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War 1914-1917 ed. by George Herbert Clark (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917), 176.

⁵Richard E. Porter and Larry A. Samovar, "Basic Principles of Intercultural Communication," chap. in Intercultural Communication: A Reader (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991), 13.

⁶Ibid. Footnotes 5 and 6 apply to material in original text that specifically refers to U.S. American and German cultural similarities. These similarities also apply when British/German comparisons are made.

⁷Howard S. Levie, ed., U.S. Naval War College International Law Studies, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1979), vol. 60, Documents on Prisoners of War, 178-200.

collective tragedies of the twentieth century is the vast differences between the mandated requirements and the realities of treatment for POWs. Many defeated combatants never made it to formal internment camps but died en route in freight cars or during forced marches. Millions perished. All creeds, colors and cultures were represented among the dead. Compliance with the Geneva Convention varied markedly depending on the cultural origins of POWs and the attitudes of the captor. For example, "Germany . . . took a contradictory stance, ignoring the Convention on the Eastern Front while generally abiding by it in handling prisoners from France, the United States and Britain on the Western Front."⁸ According to German records, no fewer than 473,000 Russian prisoners were killed. Because Stalin "wrote off his own POWs," the Russian attitude toward the German prisoners resulted in extreme neglect. Conditions were so terrible that German POWs in Russian custody experienced a mortality rate of 50%.⁹

American captives of the Germans had about a 4% death rate, whereas American captives of the Japanese experienced a 28% death rate.¹⁰ In the book, Prisoners of the Japanese, the author states that, "The war in Asia and the Pacific was a clash of armies, a clash of cultures, and—most brutally—a clash of races."¹¹ These differences were not easily bridged. Even the empathy derived from membership in the brotherhood of soldiers was denied to POWs because, according to the Japanese warrior code of *bushido*, the captives were no longer worthy of their profession of arms. Though it is impossible to separate the cultural factors from the racial

⁸Ronald H. Bailey and others, eds., World War II: Prisoners of War, (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1981), 12.

⁹Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁰Ibid., 13.

¹¹Gavan Daws, Prisoners of the Japanese (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), 17.

components of the conflict, the death rates for American captives of the Japanese (28%) as compared with American captives of the Germans (4%) appear to have suffered from the combination of racial and cultural differences.¹²

Korean War

In World War II, the price paid by many prisoners for cultural or ethnic difference was death. During the Korean War, conditions leading to life or death for the majority of American POWs were complicated by the pressures applied to make a change of allegiance—to choose between democracy or communism.

Major William E. Mayer, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, studied the coercive techniques used by the Chinese Communists¹³ in their indoctrination of the American POWs in North Korea. During an interview, he was asked, “How did the Chinese estimate the resistance or the strength of the American soldier in captivity?” He responded that:

They obviously believed that the average American soldier was poorly informed to an extreme degree about his own country, his own economic and political system; was even more poorly informed about the politics, economics and social problems of other countries; was an individual who based his sense of security and often of superiority on transient, materialistic values, and was a man who, if deprived of material sources of support would prove to be insecure, easily manipulated and controlled, lacking in real loyalties and convictions.¹⁴

¹²Environmental conditions, including endemic disease threats, that differed between the European and Pacific theaters also affected the survivability of large numbers of POWs.

¹³The Chinese Communists “were far more active in the field of POW interrogation than were their [North Korean] counterparts.” Department of the Army, U.S. Prisoners of War in the Korean Operation: A Study of Their Treatment and Handling by the North Korean Army and the Chinese Communists Forces (Fort Meade, MD: November 1954), 143.

¹⁴William E. Mayer, “Why Did Many GI Captives Cave In?” interview with Maj. William E. Mayer, U.S. Army Expert, U.S. News & World Report, 24 February 1956, 58.

Based on his studies of military reports and commentaries on prison camp management by the Communist Chinese, Major Mayer developed an estimate of their official views of American POWs in Korea.¹⁵ Among those views are two statements that are applicable to this study. The first declares that, "There is little knowledge or understanding—even among university graduates—of American political history and philosophy, the federal, State and community organizations, civil rights, freedoms, safeguards, checks and balances, and how these things all work." The second observes that the American POW "is exceedingly insular and provincial, with little or no idea of the problems and the aims of what he disdainfully describes as 'foreigners' and their countries."¹⁶

The story of Morris R. Wills, an American soldier in the Korean War who chose not to be repatriated after more than two years as a POW in North Korea, confirms some of Mayer's observations.¹⁷ Wills was one of twenty-one defectors from the United States who had become attracted to communism—with its promises of equality for all—after he had felt deserted by his government during captivity. Members of his defecting group had the common denominator of coming from broken homes or hard circumstances and many had not completed high school. Wills himself was taken prisoner by the Chinese two weeks after his eighteenth birthday.

¹⁵Mayer's interpretations were widely publicized, but not universally accepted. Another opinion was raised by Louis J. West in his perceptive article on the "Psychiatric Aspects of Training for Honorable Survival as a Prisoner of War," The American Journal of Psychiatry, 115 (October 1958): 335. He said, "many of Mayer's conclusions are not justified by the available data. I think it is possible to understand the behavior of most of the American prisoners of the Chinese Communists in terms of the nature of the prison situation, the pressures that were applied, the war that was being fought, the military status of the troops that were captured, and their overall deficiencies in training and preparation for the survival situation in which they found themselves."

¹⁶Mayer, GI Captives, 59.

¹⁷Morris R. Wills as told to J. Robert Moskin, Turncoat (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1968; Pocket Books, 1970), 1.

Although his background of being raised on a hard-scrabble farm enabled him to withstand the physical rigors of a long, torturous march while wounded, he was ill-prepared mentally to withstand the pressures of skilled indoctrination. He was not alone in his predicament.

Investigations of the performance of American POWs in Korea led to promulgation of the Code of Conduct and training programs designed to strengthen resistance to coercion in captivity.

During his imprisonment, Wills observed a survival characteristic in others that proved to be one of the most important survival tools for the Vietnam POWs—disciplined organization. He remarked that:

It was the Turks who came through this the best. They had one officer with them and he was a god; his word was absolute law. The Turks were disciplined; not one died. The British and Filipinos were also organized. The Americans were the least well organized. We had some officers with us, but they didn't take charge. An officer would order you to do something, and you'd just tell him to go to hell. Both of you felt you would probably never make it back.¹⁸

According to an intelligence study, efforts by American POWs to organize were made but, "the POWs were unable at any time to form any company or camp-wide organizations which achieved solidarity."¹⁹ The analysis laid the blame on the presence of informers and stated that, "The POW informer and the lack of cohesive, self-imposed subordination among the prisoners to their senior officers and non-commissioned officers provided the Chinese with two powerful weapons in their control over their captives."²⁰ The fact that so many Americans served as informers brought the strength of our own culture and principles under intense scrutiny after the Korean POWs were repatriated.

¹⁸Ibid., 44.

¹⁹Dept. of the Army, U.S. Prisoners of War in the Korean Operation, 15.

²⁰Ibid., 16.

Vietnam War

The Korean War experience taught us many hard lessons that proved to be valuable for those who became captives in Vietnam. The ultimate price paid by soldiers in Korea enabled many of the Vietnam POWs to survive their lengthier ordeals and return with their honor intact. Help came in the form of the Code of Conduct²¹ and realistic survival training for persons at high risk for capture. In the Korean War, the Chinese Communists used specific techniques in their interrogation and reeducation of POWs. These techniques were studied and then reproduced in arduous training scenarios. The fact that the resultant training was effective and memorable has been repeatedly validated. Testimony to the value of survival school was made by former U.S. Senator Jeremiah Denton, a Vietnam POW, who recollected that, "The rigorous training I had received in a special Navy course on how to behave as a prisoner of war had impressed me deeply, and I was determined to abide by the Code of Conduct."²²

The last Americans to be held prisoners of war by the Communist Chinese were captured during the Vietnam War, not the Korean War as many might suppose. Two Americans were shot down over Chinese territory—one in 1965 and the other in 1967. In China, their sense of isolation was real and profound. Capt Philip Smith, USAF, the first to lose his way into a Chinese prison, was kept behind physical and cultural walls for years, devoid of contact with anyone except interrogators and guards. As he debated his plight, he mused:

²¹U.S. President, Executive Order 10631, "Code of Conduct for Members of the Armed Forces of the United States," Federal Register 20 (17 August 1955), 6057, as amended.

²²Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr. with Ed Brandt, When Hell Was in Session (Mobile, AL: Traditional Press, 1982), 21.

If I had known I was going to be thrown in prison in China and kept there indefinitely, I would have prepared better before I dropped in from out of the sky. I knew little about the country, its customs, culture, politics, or people, and I knew nothing at all about how the Oriental mind worked. Being a China scholar might have helped me anticipate and understand their actions; as it was, I never knew what to expect. Western logic was of little help, for their thinking and mine seemed worlds apart.²³

Captain Smith recognized a need for knowledge beyond basic survival techniques in order to cope with his long-term imprisonment.

Many personal accounts that verify the struggle between cultures emerged from the concrete cells and bamboo cages of Vietnam. The survival techniques devised were the necessary products of **hundreds of years** of POW experience. This additional hard-won knowledge became the basis for further revision of the Code of Conduct.²⁴ If fortitude was lacking, and if honor was lost during previous eras of American POW experience, they were regained by the resolute and courageous behavior of the Vietnam POWs.

The Gulf War

During the Gulf War, the incarceration of the Desert Storm POWs did not create a lingering national angst because their period of captivity was relatively short. The plight of these POWs did not penetrate the national consciousness for years like that of the Vietnam POWs. Their names did not become household words like those of Stockdale, Denton and McCain. Hundreds of days of collective horror translated into fifteen fleeting minutes of individual fame that the Desert Storm POWs would have happily traded for cancellation of their trips to Baghdad.

²³Col. Philip E. Smith and Peggy Herz, Journey into Darkness (New York: Simon & Schuster; Pocket Books, 1992), 153.

²⁴U.S. President, Executive Order 12017, amendment to "Code of Conduct," Federal Register 42 (3 November 1977), 57941.

As in the Korean and Vietnam wars, there was a clash of highly diverse cultures. The merciful swiftness of the defeat of the Iraqis resulted in a span of captivity that ranged from a minimum of 7 days to a maximum of 48 days. Thus, long-term attempts at extracting “confessions” or encouraging conversions to the Iraqi cause were prevented.

While the focus of this paper is on the American POWs, it must not be forgotten that other members of the Allied Coalition were also imprisoned in Iraq. Their perspectives on imprisonment were fashioned by their own cultures and training. It is instructive to note that the interactions among the Americans jailed in Baghdad caused another captive some distress. A British POW, who was a sergeant in the Special Air Service (SAS), commented on the lack of caution displayed by some of the Americans noting that, “. . . the more Americans there were, the more chat there was. They wouldn’t listen to make sure there weren’t any guards around; they would just spark up, and the fallout was bad for all of us.”²⁵ This “chat” suggests a failure to develop an unobtrusive communication system. In Iraq, the subtle methods of communication used in Vietnam and the cooperation that developed among POWs did not have the opportunity to fully evolve. As a consequence, information acquired at great price by one POW might have to be bought at the same price by another— instead of at the “discount” achieved through information sharing.

The observations and opinions of Americans who were captives in Iraq are the core of this study. The Desert Storm POWs speak with clarity and conviction as they offer us a hard-won update on the effectiveness of our training programs for those who are at future risk of capture.

²⁵Andy McNab, Bravo Two Zero (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Gp.; Island Books, 1993), 369.

CHAPTER 2

COMPONENTS OF POW CULTURE

"Culture shock" is a term used to describe the state of anxiety produced by immersion in an unfamiliar culture.²⁶ It has many components which vary in their contribution to the individual's feeling of unease depending on the degree of difference between his culture and the one he is visiting. According to Argyle, areas where people of different cultures are likely to have misunderstandings include: (1) language, (2) nonverbal communication, (3) rules of social situations, (4) social relationships, (5) motivation, and (6) concepts and ideology.²⁷ Of these six areas of difficulty, the immediate brick walls for a POW are language, nonverbal communication and ideology.

The Culture of Captivity

Capture Shock

"Capture shock" is an extreme form of culture shock. It is the transition from freedom to fear. Escape from the enemy has become all but impossible. Life as a hostage or prisoner of

²⁶K. Oberg, "Cultural shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments," *Practical Anthropology*, (1960):7, 177-182 quoted in Michael Argyle, "Intercultural Communication," in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 33.

²⁷ Michael Argyle, "Intercultural Communication," in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 43.

war has begun. At the point of capture, the POW will be confronted by an alien ideology.

Usually, he will also encounter a foreign language, unfamiliar gestures and unknown rules that he will unwittingly break. Experience has shown that:

Adapting to the captor's unspoken cultural rules for "correct" behavior is . . . largely a process of trial and error. Rarely does a POW receive any tutoring from his captor. For those areas of human conduct performed unconsciously, it is much easier to recognize "incorrect" behavior after the fact than it is to admonish in advance. Captors, therefore, punish prisoners for their mistakes without first telling them all the rules.¹

Capture shock is at the intersection of the captor's culture, the captive's culture and the culture of captivity itself. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship:

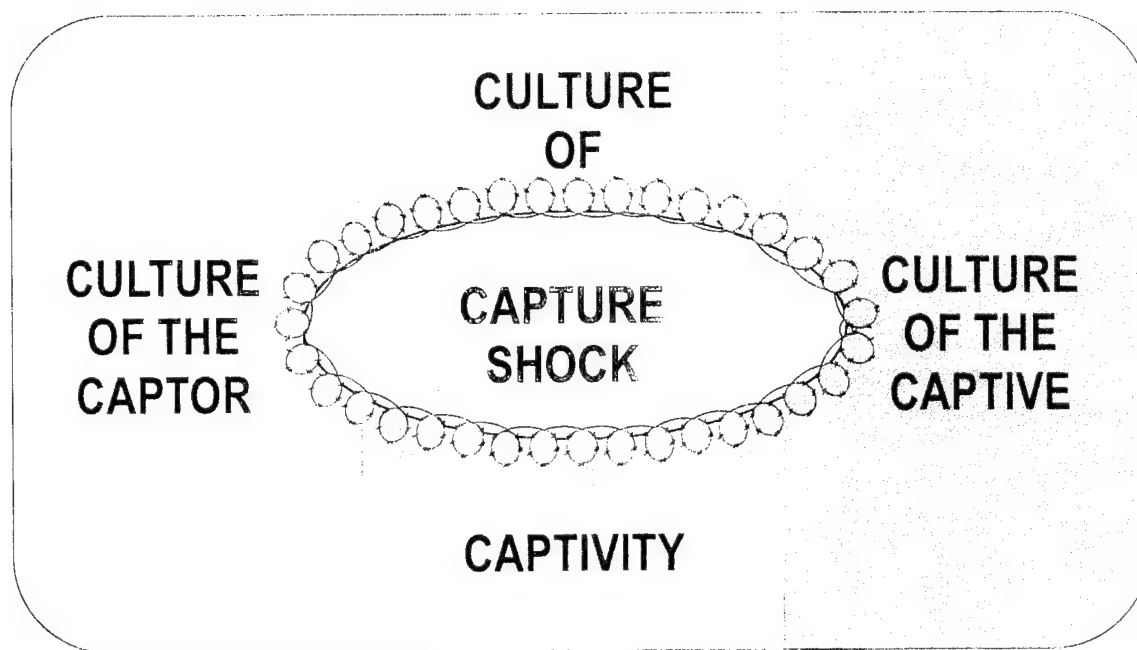


Figure 1 Capture Shock - occurs at the point of convergence of the captor's culture and the captive's culture. It is the initiation into the culture of captivity.

¹William K. Carr, "The Faceless POW," Naval War College Review, Fall 1977, 89.

In his book Before Honor, Captain Eugene "Red" McDaniel described his feelings at the moment of capture during the Vietnam War in a chapter aptly entitled, "The Grim Reality." "All of the information I had about the nature of the Oriental attitude toward Americans in war right then did not seem to matter much."²⁹ Capture shock—it is the time when fear rules and adrenaline³⁰ sustains the system. Nothing but survival matters.

Long-term Captivity

Capture shock begins to taper off as the prisoner is able to find comfort in the smallest respite from cold, pain, thirst and fear. The captive has survived initial interrogations and, possibly, mob violence or torture. Sounds, smells and routines become recognizable. Things, however grim, are starting to look a little better. Assignment to a permanent cell is actually a relief. A British POW in Desert Storm described his progression from echelon to echelon with each stop along the way containing new unknowns and terrors. However, when placed in a 12 by 9-foot cell in the military prison in Baghdad, he remarked that, "compared with the interrogation center this was Buckingham Palace."³¹

As capture shock recedes and the long-term phase³² begins, the captive is able to find a

²⁹Eugene B. McDaniel with James L. Johnson, Before Honor (Philadelphia and New York: A. J. Holman division of J. B. Lippincott, 1975), 34.

³⁰Adrenaline (epinephrine) is a hormone produced in greater amounts than normal when the body is subjected to extreme stress. Its physiologic effects include heart stimulation as well as increased blood sugar, muscular strength and endurance. An "adrenaline rush" cannot be sustained indefinitely. When it ends, pain that was previously masked becomes noticeable and exhaustion occurs.

³¹McNab, Bravo Two Zero, 347.

³²Entry into the long-term phase of captivity begins at different times and places for each individual. The long-term phase is characterized by cessation of relocation, establishment of a daily routine and the realization that release from imprisonment will not occur quickly.

small amount of pleasure in simple things and may become optimistic about survival. A statement made by Major Rhonda Cornum, USA, illustrates this transition:

I had been fed a decent meal and had sipped a cup of hot tea. I was alive and my captors had given me medical care. I was a prisoner of war in Iraq, and I had no idea how long I would be there, but all things considered, life was not bad.³³

Items that would have been discarded at home—the stub of a pencil, a cigarette wrapper, a rusty nail—achieve a new value. The written word—no matter how mundane the subject—becomes a precious commodity. As a hostage in Beirut, the Presbyterian missionary Ben Weir stated, “. . . I felt good about my growing library: a piece of newspaper and two drug package inserts. Not much, but far better than nothing.”³⁴ Keeping track of time, especially while in solitary confinement, assumes a high priority. Weir was able to keep track of time and the days of the week as a result of his knowledge of Muslim prayer routine. He was also able to deduce information about his captors.

. . . it finally dawned on me that [the guard] was going through ritual ablution, washing his arms and legs and rinsing out his mouth in preparation for morning prayer. If I listened carefully I could hear a distant Muslim call to prayer: five times between sunrise and the hour after sunset. This seemed to indicate that I was among Shiite Muslims . . .³⁵

Survival for the long term is enhanced by obtaining information. Captors usually attempt to keep their prisoners isolated from information about the world they left unless the news can be manipulated to increase doubt and anxiety. By collecting every possible scrap of information about the captor and his environment, the POW can devise techniques to counter enemy

³³Rhonda Cornum as told to Peter Copeland, She Went to War: The Rhonda Cornum Story (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1992), 88.

³⁴Ben Weir and Carol Weir with Dennis Benson, Hostage Bound, Hostage Free (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 58.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 48.

propaganda while also sustaining his mental alertness. The Vietnam POWs achieved group strength by recognizing this. Over time, they were able to organize themselves, cooperate in their intelligence gathering efforts and share information throughout the chain of command they established.

If we were to succeed at all in maintaining our communications, in building a necessary togetherness, we had to know as much as possible about our captors. We began to sense that the Viets were stoic, hard to know, hard to read, and inconsistent. "The only thing consistent about the North Vietnamese," we would often say, "is their inconsistency." Whether that was a deliberate attempt to keep us off balance or their nature, we did not know; the main thing was that it frustrated us in our attempts to stay ahead of their intentions. . . .³⁶

Another strategy needed to endure the culture of captivity for the long-term is the "ability to focus on survival for some purpose."³⁷ The chosen purpose is highly individualized but usually centers around family and friends, leadership or spiritual themes. Those in prolonged captivity who are destitute of purpose become early victims.

While none of the Desert Storm POWs endured lengthy imprisonment, they all experienced capture shock. Some may have begun the transition into the long-term phase of captivity. The uncertainty of survival and the unpredictability of release affected each of their days. Though small in number, they represent a new generation of POW experience which derived many of its lessons from the Vietnam era. The Desert Storm POWs graciously contributed their time and their opinions by participating in the survey which is described and analyzed in the following pages.

³⁶McDaniel, Before Honor, 48.

³⁷Jared Tinklenberg, "Coping with Terrorist Victimization," in Victims of Terrorism, ed. Frank M. Ochberg and David A. Soskis (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 70.

CHAPTER 3

THE DESERT STORM POW SURVEY

Objective

The ultimate aim of this study is to utilize insights obtained from historical sources and the combined assessment of the Desert Storm POWs to suggest training recommendations for the operational forces. The Desert Storm POWs have the most recent experience with the problem of "coping with captivity." They possess the most current and compelling credentials for providing insight and advice on training which promotes honorable survival as a prisoner of war.

Since 1974, the Naval Aerospace and Operational Medical Institute (NAMI) has provided comprehensive medical follow-up for repatriated prisoners of war (RPOWs) from Vietnam.³⁸ In 1991, the Desert Storm POWs were enrolled in the follow-up studies. The overall objective of the studies is "to determine whether there are captivity-related problems which can be predicted and possibly handled differently in future prisoners of war. . . ."³⁹ One of the program's goals is to detect illness, and prevent or reduce future problems. Another important goal is to see

³⁸This research project was performed in cooperation with the Special Studies Department of the Naval Aerospace and Operational Medical Institute (NAMI), 220 Hovey Road, Pensacola, Florida 32508.

³⁹Robert E. Mitchell, "The Vietnam Prisoners of War: A Follow-up," Foundation (Fall 1991): 31.

whether Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training had an influence on the outcome of imprisonment.⁴⁰ The purpose of this survey is closely linked to the latter goal.

Survey Construction

The Desert Storm POW Survey (appendix A) was developed following survey construction guidance found in social research textbooks.⁴¹ Lin's recommendations on the construction of the covering letter were followed in detail.⁴²

The survey form was unique in that the usual identifiers such as name, rank, date of birth, service affiliation and such were not requested on the form. This approach was used for three reasons. First, the group to be surveyed consisted of a small number of persons whose personal identification data were available if needed for some facet of the analysis. Second, all military persons are bombarded with forms and surveys that require repetition of the "usual identifiers." It was hoped that participation in the survey would be enhanced by eliminating the needless aggravation of repetition. Third, an attempt to reduce bias in the initial analysis was made by coding the answers sheets with a randomly assigned letter so that the identities of the respondents would not be known. The key to the letter codes was kept in the custody of a third party who had no interest in the outcome of the analysis. However, with the small number of participants, it was inevitable that two persons with unique educational and experiential identifiers

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹A. N. Oppenheim, Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement (New York: Basic Books, 1966); Nan Lin, Foundations of Social Research (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Earl Babbie, The Practice of Social Research (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1983).

⁴²Lin, Social Research, 222.

could not remain anonymous. Coincidentally, these were the two individuals who chose to write a return address on the reply envelope.

Distribution and Response

The covering letters and survey forms were placed in a folder along with a pencil and a pre-addressed, postage-paid return envelope provided to make participation as easy as possible. A stamped postcard for requesting a copy of the research paper was also included in the package. All 21 packages were mailed on 22 September 1995. During the following ten days, six were returned for out-of-date addresses. These were mailed out again with additional covering letters as soon as the new addresses were obtained. The last mailing occurred on 3 October. Returns were received beginning on 27 September and ending on 16 October 1995.

Prior to the mailing of the survey, an attempt was made to contact all members of the survey group either in person, while they were receiving their annual physical examinations at the Naval Aerospace and Operational Medical Institute in Pensacola, FL, or by telephone to encourage their participation. Although the majority were contacted, this effort did not achieve total coverage, in part, due to the inevitable changes of addresses and phone numbers that result from new military assignments. No follow-up mailings or phone calls were made in order to avoid undue pressure on the POWs and to keep participation completely voluntary.

The response to the survey was gratifying. Seventeen persons (81%) returned their questionnaires.⁴³ Persons who did **not** wish to participate in the survey were requested to place a

⁴³According to Babbie, "a response rate of at least 50 percent is *adequate* for analysis and reporting. A response rate of at least 60 percent is *good*. And a response rate of 70 percent is *very good*." In The Practice of Social Research, 226.

large X on the cover and return the form in the postage-paid envelope. The aim of this request was to validate that the survey had reached its intended destination, but no one responded in this manner. Although written comments were optional, 16 of the 17 respondents added their personal observations thereby enhancing the value of the survey. Each respondent's phonetic alphabet code and the date of return of the survey are used as an identifier in the footnotes of Chapters 4 and 5 in this paper.

Cohort Characteristics

There were 21 American military POWs captured in Iraq during the Gulf War in January and February of 1991. This was the cohort⁴⁴ that was surveyed. The group consisted of 8 Air Force, 5 Army, 3 Navy and 5 Marine Corps personnel. There were 17 officers and 4 enlisted personnel who ranged in age from 20 to 43 (Mean age = 32.5 years) when the air war began in January 1991. As noted in the previous section, there were 17 respondents to the survey.

The characteristics described from this point on apply to the response group of 17 persons which consisted of 13 officer and 4 enlisted personnel drawn from all the services. Fifteen of the respondents were male and 2 were female.

The overall educational level was high with 4 persons reporting high school and technical training; 7 had bachelors degrees, 4 earned masters degrees and 2 had attained doctoral degrees. In spite of the profusion of degrees, only 5 persons claimed expertise in a language other than

⁴⁴In this instance, two definitions of the word "cohort" apply. A cohort is "a subgroup sharing a common factor in a statistical survey, as age or income level", Webster's New World Dictionary of American English, 3d college ed., (1988), s.v. "cohort." It is also a "group united in a struggle," Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary, (1988), s.v. "cohort."

English. Of these five, all reported basic ability in one other language, while one had intermediate skill in a second foreign language.

Fourteen persons reported a cultural background that was largely "American, without significant influence from persons of another nationality."⁴⁵ Two persons had minor influence from another nationality during their upbringing, while one person experienced major foreign influence as a result of being born and living abroad for 17 years.

Problem Areas

In this study no control group was surveyed. The unique nature of the Desert Storm POWs' experience at this juncture in history does not allow for ready comparison. The survey instrument was specifically designed to address POW captivity issues. Having been a POW is the basic qualification for being able to answer the key questions on the survey (see appendix A).⁴⁶

The study cohort is small. Even though 81% responded to the questionnaire, any analysis performed is particularly sensitive to variations and errors due to the small sample size. Analysis of complex interactions within this small cohort is not possible.

Certain questions cannot be evaluated, such as "Does gender have an effect on a POW's outlook?" If it is assumed that gender does result in a different assessment of the POW experience, then the results given here could be criticized for including the answers of the female respondents.

⁴⁵See Appendix A, Question no. 3.

⁴⁶Members of the Vietnam POW group (matched with the Desert Storm cohort for characteristics such as age at time of capture, rank, branch and years of service, education, survival training and cultural background) could provide a basis for a look at the opinions generated by long-term versus short-term captivity.

Questions which measure attitudes are particularly sensitive to nuances of wording and construction errors that might alter interpretation. Such problems may not be noticed until analysis of results reveals unusual patterns. Two questions in the survey proved to be troublesome.⁴⁷

A suggested "return the completed survey by" date was mentioned in the covering letter. The letter failed to clearly state that returns after that date were acceptable. This oversight could have resulted in response failure.

⁴⁷Refer to the Desert Storm POW Survey (appendix A). Question 35 consists of ten statements (A through J) that are opinions. The respondent expresses his agreement, disagreement or uncertainty by checking appropriate boxes. Statements A through I are phrased in a positive manner. Statement J abruptly shifts the emphasis. As written, it says, "Lack of cultural knowledge can make honorable survival as a POW more difficult." Better wording, that matched the positive phrasing of the preceding statements, would have been, "Cultural knowledge can make honorable survival as a POW easier." The word "honorable", which requires a second value judgment, may have further complicated the choice. Four respondents switched their overall pattern of answering from general agreement to disagreement upon reaching statement 35J thereby creating inconsistency in their replies. Question 35E, contained a misspelling. The intended word, "compromising," was printed as "comprising."

CHAPTER 4

DESERT STORM SURVEY ANALYSIS

SERE Training

Of the seventeen respondents, ten individuals had been through Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training. The average elapsed time between SERE training and capture was 9.5 years (range 1- 16 years). Six of the ten had received their training during the mid to late '70's, but it had not been forgotten. Everyone agreed that the captivity phase training was "useful" (20%) or "very useful" (80%). All, but one, agreed that the land survival phase was either "useful" (50%) or "very useful" (40%). The one individual who found the land survival phase to be "of no use" checked the "Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time" option on the questionnaire. This same individual was one of the two persons who gave the SERE captivity phase a "useful" rating. He offered the following instructive comments:

My SERE training (circa 1978) was more of an evasion exercise. Mock captivity happened only if caught—I wasn't. Resistance training was done in a classroom environment. What this whole course did was get me very interested in the Vietnam POW experience. Through my career, I read extensively about their experiences. I credit this study in saving my life and helping me survive my own POW experience with honor."⁴⁸

⁴⁸Echo, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 27 Sep 1995, E-11.

Another individual who rated the SERE survival and captivity phases as “useful” stated that:

Sixteen years had passed since my SERE type training. I feel a refresher of sorts every year or so for operational units would be helpful. The training might only consist of a “training film”, but it would be very effective if actual POWs related their circumstances and presented helpful hints.⁴⁹

It is likely that in both of the above cases, the distance in time from the training partially contributed to the lower value assessment it received. However, many years of elapsed time from the date of SERE training did not necessarily diminish its merit as indicated by another individual who made a succinct testimonial to its value with the observation that:

The “hands on” resistance training conducted in SERE at the USAF Academy [1977]⁵⁰ was the single most important element of my preparation for the POW experience. It gave me a mental & psychological framework for understanding the nature of the situation I found myself.⁵¹

Reflecting a common sentiment, one of the POWs with the most recent SERE training (NAS North Island, 1989) said, “SERE school has been the best military school I’ve ever attended, even though I hated it at the time!”⁵² He went on to say that:

Every single type of interrogation/coercion technique taught at SERE school, we saw in Baghdad. . . . having seen it once before was a big help in knowing what was happening to me and what the Iraqis were trying to do. I felt at times that I had control of the situation with that knowledge. It made for some “little victories” when I really needed them.⁵³

⁴⁹Bravo, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 28 Sep 1995, B-11.

⁵⁰As of 1995, the resistance and escape portion of SERE training has been eliminated from the curriculum of the Air Force Academy. This change resulted from controversies over rape-prevention scenarios that had been introduced into the curriculum in 1993. Reported by Vago Muradian, “Academy Training Survives,” Air Force Times, 26 June 1995, 14.

⁵¹X-ray, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 16 Oct 1995, X-11.

⁵²Sierra, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 6 Oct 1995, S-11.

⁵³Ibid.

An individual who had not had SERE training felt that, "For the six and one-half weeks a few of us were held, the lack of SERE training had no effect. . . . If we had been held longer (months) SERE training would have helped—but some of us would have already died due to malnutrition."⁵⁴ Among other benefits, SERE training could have offered this person the reassurance that survival can be maintained on meager rations for a long time. His fear of starvation could be lessened by knowledge. As West stated, "The prisoner need not die or collapse psychologically because of the *fear* of starvation."⁵⁵

Only three people reported having Advanced SERE (ASERE) training.⁵⁶ One person who reported attending three separate sessions of ASERE found it to be "of little use," because the material lacked relevance and quality. The two other attendees rated their ASERE sessions as "very useful."

Survival Training and POW Literature

A series of four questions (appendix A, q. 16-19) was used to determine the level of interest in survival training topics and prisoner of war literature during the period before, then after, captivity. Interest in such topics has survival benefit. The previously cited quote⁵⁷ which credited study of POW experiences for being life saving confirms this assumption.

⁵⁴Uniform, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 29 Sep 1995, U-11.

⁵⁵West, "Training for Honorable Survival," 332.

⁵⁶ASERE training supplements previous SERE training with up-to-date briefings on current threat areas. It is classroom-based.

⁵⁷Ibid., Echo, E-11.

The overall interest in both survival topics and POW literature before capture was equal and quite high with 71% reporting at least moderate interest. Five persons (29%) reported "low" or "negligible" interest in the subjects before captivity. After captivity, everyone had developed "moderate" or greater interest in both subjects.

Cultural training

Eleven of the 17 respondents had been exposed to some type of cultural training. Eight of these 11 selected the word "basic" to describe their level of training. One person had spent four months in Oman which he felt was a "tremendous help." He stated that, "My time in Oman was a great primer for time in Baghdad."⁵⁸

Three persons with cultural training had augmented their other exposures to Arabic culture by means of self-study. A fourth individual who listed self-study as his sole source of cultural education felt that he had achieved an "intermediate" level of knowledge. One POW, who was born in Beirut, Lebanon and had lived among Lebanese, Arab, Palestinian and Israeli cultures for 17 years, justly laid claim to "advanced" cultural training. Of the eight who reported "basic" cultural introductions, the majority (88%) had received a pre-deployment or in-country briefing. One had read message traffic on survival and cultural subjects.

Those who engaged in self-study represent a highly motivated group who experienced a varying degree of success from their efforts. One person reported having insufficient time for in-depth work and rated the outcome of his efforts to be "of little use." The individual who found the self-study to be "very useful" said that:

⁵⁸Tango, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 5 Oct 1995, N-10,11.

[It] helped me to understand how they had treated prisoners in the past and gave me some awareness of how they might act. . . . Also, [self-study] gave me a basis for giving them credible responses during interrogations. That is, I tried to give answers that they would find believable given their culture and military training. . . .”⁵⁹

He went on to say that, “most of my knowledge came from reading books about the area after the war started and intelligence reports. I feel that my knowledge base on Arabic culture was limited but very helpful. In other words—it doesn’t take a lot to do some good.”⁶⁰ The most pointed and extensive comments were written by another member of this well-motivated group who summarized his views by stating that:

To appreciate/understand their culture is beneficial to the extent that it prepares one to be treated like an animal. The Code of Conduct and communication with other POWs were the primary tools of survival. Cultural education is still very beneficial and psychologically prepares one for what to expect in captivity. Hopefully, our people flying missions over Bosnia are receiving training in this area so they are prepared for the worst.⁶¹

An individual without benefit of SERE training but with some basic cultural knowledge that came from “military briefs and pamphlets” found the information to be useful because it enabled him “not to excessively anger [his] captors”.⁶² Another person felt that the information that was presented in briefings prior to deployment was “filled with stereotypes—not useful, possibly negative value.”⁶³

⁵⁹November, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 10 Oct 1995, N-9.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. N-11.

⁶¹Victor, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 16 Oct 1995, V-11.

⁶²Hotel, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 28 Sep 1995, H-9.

⁶³Delta, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 2 Oct 1995, D-9.

Cultural Knowledge and Captivity Experiences

Opinions on the relationship of culture to various aspects of captivity were solicited through a series of ten statements (appendix A, q. 35A-35J).⁶⁴ The least controversial statements dealt with the effect of the captor's culture on treatment and interrogation of POWs. The majority "strongly agreed" that the captor's culture affected both his treatment of prisoners and his interrogation methods. Avoidance of unintentional verbal and nonverbal offense were also considered by the majority to be areas where cultural training could help.⁶⁵ As reported by one respondent, "Simply understanding the basic 'Do & Don'ts' prevented 'accidental' insults to my captors. Additionally, knowing the cultural mentality allowed me to adjust my behavior during interrogation to resist answering militarily significant questions."⁶⁶ This same individual who had attended short briefings that dealt with cultural issues prior to deployment and who had engaged in self-study of Arabic culture reported that, "Having 5 months of 'preparatory' work during Desert Shield allowed me to interact—in residence—with the Arabic culture. This was very valuable to my better understanding their cultural mind set."⁶⁷

Opinions were evenly divided on whether cultural knowledge would be of value in alleviating capture shock. Two persons who disagreed that cultural knowledge would help in the capture shock phase chose to comment. One said that, "Captivity, not the captor's culture is the

⁶⁴This ten-part "culture and captivity question" is composed of statements concerning the interaction of culture or cultural training with various captivity issues. It was structured in the Likert scale format which enables the respondent to *strongly agree* (SA), *agree* (A), *disagree* (D), *strongly disagree* (SD) or remain *undecided* (U).

⁶⁵The percentages of respondents for each of the statement categories in question 35 are listed in appendix B.

⁶⁶Golf, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 5 Oct 1995, G-9

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, G-11.

problem!”⁶⁸ The other felt that “nothing” can ease the initial shock of capture.⁶⁹ Long-term captivity, on the other hand, was recognized by the majority (71%) as a period when cultural knowledge would be of benefit. “I feel an understanding of ‘who’ your enemy is, is vital, not so much for the initial capture but certainly for the period following when you begin to regain your wits!”⁷⁰

Opinions were also divided on whether knowledge of the captor would help with “hard sell” and “soft sell” interrogation.⁷¹ More agreed that cultural knowledge would be of value in resisting subtle techniques (47%) than resisting aggressive techniques (35%). Appendix B tabulates the percentage of responses to each statement choice.

Length of Captivity

Shorter term captives⁷² were more likely to be “undecided” in their responses than persons held longer. Four of the 5 (80%) shorter term captives were “undecided” on some aspect of the “culture and captivity” question, but only 4 out of 12 (33%) of the longer term captives chose an “undecided” response. Although they “disagreed” with some statements, none of the 5 shorter term captives “**strongly** disagreed” with any of the ten statements in the “culture and

⁶⁸Delta, Survey, D-10.

⁶⁹November, Survey, N-10.

⁷⁰Bravo, B-11.

⁷¹“Hard sell” interrogation is accompanied by torture or threats. “Soft sell” interrogation is done by a “friendly” interrogator who uses subtle coercion or trickery to obtain information.

⁷²Shorter term captivity ranged from 7 to 15 days. Longer term captivity ranged from 26 to 48 days. The “shorter vs. longer” distinction is somewhat arbitrary and subdivides an already small group, but there was a discernible hardening of opinion in the longer captivity sub-group.

captivity” question. On the other hand, among the longer term captives 8 out of 12 persons (67%) “**strongly** disagreed” with 15% of the total statements they assessed. It appears that opinions were solidified by longer imprisonment although the two sub-groups are too small to allow for ironclad conclusions based on this observation.

Before . . . After . . . Future

The interest in Arabic culture that the participants acknowledged having before they were captives was generally rated as “low.” Following their imprisonment, the predominant level of interest expressed in Arabic culture was “moderate” (88%). As a group, their desire to learn about the culture of an opposing force in a future conflict was “high” (41%) or “very high” (35%). The group consensus on the “after captivity” and the “future motivation” questions suggests a belief in the value of cultural knowledge. When coupled with the 71% who agreed that **lack** of cultural knowledge could make honorable survival as a POW **more difficult**, there appears to be a general agreement that cultural knowledge is useful for a prisoner of war.

CHAPTER 5

CULTURAL TRAINING

Focus

"Any cultural training would have to be relevant and concise in order to be of value to a pilot. Broad over-generalizations of one's culture would tend to make me disregard the classes being taught. Give me hard facts, figures, salient points."⁷³ Heartily concur. Forwarded recommending approval.

The Double-edged Scimitar

Cultural knowledge is only a partial antidote to fear in any captivity situation. It can also be a source of fear. Terry Anderson was an Associated Press correspondent who had lived in Beirut for three years before becoming a hostage in Lebanon for 2,454 days. He was fascinated by Lebanon's "endless complications" and quickly acquired a knowledge of its inner workings as a reporter. He noted that, "The culture was an incredible mix of the superficially European and deep Arabic substance. The more I learned, under the pressure of war, the more I saw parallels

⁷³Charlie, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 16 Oct 1995, C-11.

with Asia. This 'Middle Eastern' country was more eastern than middle."⁷⁴ He had no illusions about the violent nature of the society that was Lebanon in the 1980's.

Then there was the incredible violence. I've seen violence before, many times in my six years as a foreign correspondent, as a reporter in the States, and before that as a Marine in Vietnam. But the scale and intensity and sheer ferocity of these people appalled me.⁷⁵

Anderson made the following observations on the first day of his captivity on March 16, 1985.

More demands. Refusals. Strangely, the procedure was still without heat. It didn't seem as if they really meant the threats. It was hard to believe they might carry them out, though nothing I had ever seen in Lebanon gave me any confidence in their humanity or reluctance to inflict pain.⁷⁶

The Desert Storm POW who felt that the insights he acquired while growing up in Beirut were valuable survival assets, also recognized his cultural knowledge as a source of fear.

This baseline understanding was both a help and a hindrance while in Iraq as a POW. Much of what happened around me—sights, smells, sounds, "energy"—was very familiar and unthreatening. However, with a clearer understanding than others of how cruel the Arab culture can be, and how deep-rooted their hatred (some) of the U.S. [is], I was terribly afraid. My fears were based less on "the unknown" (a typical fear-generator) than other POWs. It was, of course, still the primary source of fear.⁷⁷

As the above comments suggest, something beyond cultural knowledge is needed to help the POW deal with the stressors of captivity.

⁷⁴Terry Anderson, Den of Lions (New York: TMS Corporation, 1993; Ballantine Books, 1994), 37.

⁷⁵Ibid., 38.

⁷⁶Ibid., 11.

⁷⁷Papa, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 6 Oct 1995, P-9.

Linkage between SERE and Cultural Training

There is a natural linkage between SERE and cultural training for the purpose of preparing high risk personnel to survive as prisoners of war. Historically, scenarios used in SERE training have simulated a foreign enemy. The enemy plays by “rules” that are unknown to the captive trainee. These unknown rules may be generic rather than specific to a given culture. Time, training and talent are required for the instructor “enemies” to learn their culture’s rules and portray their roles in a believable manner. Thus, it would be difficult to change the cultural overlay of SERE training often. It would be easier to focus on the cultural rules of a specific adversary using one or more of the training resources suggested on the following pages.

Most important, though, the outcome of any POW training needs to be preparation for the culture of captivity which has some universal common denominators. The trainee needs to enter the enemy’s system through a period of stress that allows him to experience the exhaustion and fear that are the root of capture shock. Otherwise, the trainee will **drift** into the culture of captivity without entering via the rite of passage that is capture shock (see figure 1).

The toughness of SERE training has been feared, but revered for its effectiveness. That toughness is a necessary element for realism and recall of its lessons; especially, if a long period intervenes between the training and the need for it.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Recall that the average elapsed time between SERE training and capture was 9.5 years (range 1- 16 years) in this survey sample.

Training Levels

The system already in place for Code of Conduct training⁷⁹ offers a suitable framework for cultural training. Code of Conduct training levels are linked with the need for increased survival skill and resistance to exploitation as risk of capture escalates. Based on the natural linkage discussed above, the greater the risk of capture, the greater the need for cultural knowledge to assist in the avoidance of exploitation.

Some degree of cultural training for all personnel serving in coalition environments would promote understanding and facilitate cooperation. A study of cross-cultural encounters between American and Arab coalition forces during the Gulf War revealed weaknesses in the preparation of Army personnel that were not members of Special Forces (SF) units. The training assessment statement said, "For non-SF units, the preparation reflected a widely varied, but hastily assembled, improvised quality. Outside the SF community, Army cross-cultural preparation is not institutionalized in any way."⁸⁰ This lack of "institutionalized" preparation is a DOD-wide problem. It is hard to develop quality resources and keep up the support for training that will be focused on a very few. By looking at the wider audience that would benefit from well-structured cultural training, our effectiveness in dealing with cross-cultural encounters in situations such as coalition exercises, multi-national rescue scenarios, enemy prisoner of war operations and humanitarian relief efforts could be improved.

⁷⁹U.S. Navy Dept., Code of Conduct Training, OPNAVINST 1000.24B (Washington: 1989), 1.

⁸⁰James K. Bruton and Edward C. Stewart, The Gulf War: An Analysis of American and Arab Cross-Cultural Encounters, (Langley AFB, VA: Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict, 1995), 31.

Training Resources

The following section offers some ideas on cultural training resources that are currently available through the military training system. Commercially available products are also mentioned to suggest ways of offering interesting and memorable instruction for deploying units.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have a particular need for understanding the cultural milieu of both friendly and opposing forces. This community is the present standard-bearer for military applications of cultural knowledge. The USAF Special Operations School (USAFSOS) offers "15 different courses presented 72 times per year."⁸¹ The school welcomes participants from all the services as well as DOD civilians. Among the courses offered are two that specifically relate to this study: (1) Middle East Orientation and (2) Cross Cultural Communications. However, dollars, duties and deployments dictate against everyone taking a lengthy course at a distant training site. Self-study which follows a formal reading list and utilizes suggested multimedia resources may offer an inexpensive and useful alternative.

Though information abounds on most countries and cultures, the quality is variable and the sources are scattered. Four of the ten Desert Storm POWs that reported having cultural training undertook self-study as a means to increase their knowledge. For one of these four, self study was the sole source of training. Developing culture-specific professional reading lists for different threat areas would be an inexpensive approach to improving the self-study option. A reading list would assist the motivated and, possibly, encourage others to explore the option. It would be worthwhile to structure such a reading list with difficulty levels like those found in the

⁸¹USAF Special Operations School, Catalog for Fiscal Year 96, (Hurlburt Field, FL: USAFSOS, 1995), 6.

Chief of Naval Operations' Professional Reading List. The following is a sample offering of government produced materials containing cultural information organized by country:

- Country Studies/Area Handbook Program - comprehensive, hard-bound volumes published by the Library of Congress under Army auspices. They cover individual countries from their historical, political and economic perspectives. These are not updated very frequently due to their size and complexity. (**Advanced**)
- State Department Background Notes - concise, yet very thorough, coverage of individual countries with sections on demographics, history, politics, culture, climate and geography, etc. that are usually about ten pages in length. They are updated approximately every three years so the information is reasonably current. One of the better unclassified sources for a quick overview. (**Intermediate**)
- Country Handbooks - produced by the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity in a shape that can fit in a cargo pocket for ready reference in the field. Considerable variability in size and content. In addition to maps and military information, they contain brief phrase and vocabulary sections for the subject country as well as a very short cultural section. (**Basic**)

An obvious obstacle to self-study is that personnel occupied by other job requirements will have little enthusiasm for studying a topic that may be perceived as remotely useful.⁸² Once a high-risk operation begins, the focus is on more essential mission requirements.

Cultural training must be offered in an easily digestible and interesting format especially if formalized self-study is a primary method for making it available. Videotape instructional systems offer such a format. One worthwhile example, a short course that applies to the Arab world, consists of a video and an accompanying workbook.⁸³ In the near future, CD-ROM drives will be as ubiquitous as floppy disc drives. CD-ROM technology offers vast potential for instructional purposes. A field called "edutainment" has been spawned and is now a category of

⁸²Correspondence courses that offer incentives for completion may encourage participation.

⁸³AMIDEAST, *Introduction to the Arab World*, (Washington, DC: 1989). The originator of the course, AMIDEAST, describes itself as "a nonprofit American organization promoting educational and cultural exchange between the United States and the Middle East."

software in computer catalogs. Offerings that fit into the cultural education realm are becoming more common. Examples in a recent software catalog include two interactive CD-ROMs—an atlas for teaching physical and cultural geography produced by National Geographic, and a cultural and historical overview of Vietnam. The “edutainment” approach is much more likely to attract an audience than a dry, didactic presentation. Production of CD-ROM titles for military instruction would maximize portability and flexibility for learning in many settings.⁸⁴

The Chair of Comparative Cultures

In the late 1960's, during the Vietnam War, members of the Naval War College (NWC) faculty identified the need for educating war college students on cultural issues. As a result, the establishment of a Chair of Comparative Cultures was recommended in a letter from the President of the Naval War College, VADM John T. Hayward,⁸⁵ to the Chief of Naval Operations that included the following rationale:

In recognition of the deep involvement of the United State in almost every area of the world, it has become increasingly important for students at the Naval War College to develop an understanding which is as complete as possible of the social and psychological factors influencing our cultural, as well as of the political, economic and military, relations with a wide variety of nations.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Many laptop/notebook computers accompanied deployed forces to the Middle East in 1991. Many more, with increasingly sophisticated technology, portability, improved battery life, etc., will be present at the next event.

⁸⁵VADM John T. Hayward served as President, Naval War College from 1966-1968.

⁸⁶VADM John T. Hayward, President, Naval War College to Chief of Naval Operations, 23 January 1968, “Current and Future Plans for Employment of Civilian Professors at the Naval War College,” (Newport, RI: Naval War College Archives, RG3), 2.

The Chair was established on 1 August 1969 with guidance to select the faculty member from outstanding civilian authorities in the social science disciplines.⁸⁷ Among the chief duties of the chair holder was to provide guidance on “matters pertaining to the social sciences, particularly in the field of cultural differences and their effect on the national attitudes and behavior of the peoples concerned.”⁸⁸ The Chair was filled for three of the four years during the period of 1969 through 1973. It then disappeared amid the major curriculum changes that occurred during the presidency of VADM Stansfield Turner⁸⁹ who shifted the focus of obtaining “breadth of knowledge in numerous areas to depth in a few select areas.”⁹⁰ However, the disappearance of this Chair seems to have run counter to Turner’s efforts to bolster the academic credentials of the NWC faculty by increasing the hiring of prominent civilian professors who could remain with the college for a period longer than a typical military assignment would allow.

The necessity for counterinsurgency personnel to acquire cultural knowledge was evident to those who established the Chair of Comparative Cultures. One of the assigned duties of the occupant of the Chair was to “provide advice and assistance to the Head, Counterinsurgency Study as his principal academic advisor.”⁹¹ Such foresight presaged the fact that today, SOF personnel are among the chief military consumers of intercultural information.

⁸⁷Naval War College, The Chair of Comparative Cultures, NAVWARCOL Instruction 5400.29 (Newport, RI: 1969), 1.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹VADM Stansfield Turner Served as President, Naval War College from 1972-1974.

⁹⁰John B. Hattendorf, B. Mitchell Simpson, III, and John R. Wadleigh, Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1984), 292.

⁹¹NAVWARCOL Instruction 5400.29 of 12 March 1969, 2.

The Naval War College now has two military chairs that deal with cultural issues as a subset of their overall responsibilities—the Edward G. Lansdale Military Chair of Operations Other Than War, and the William J. Donovan Military Chair of Special Operations. Both were established in 1994. There is no chair that has cultural issues as its main focus. Yet there is increasing recognition that, “We will fight men who do not look, think, or act like us, and this can lead to a dangerous dehumanizing of the enemy, just as it will make it more difficult for us to understand him.”⁹² Furthermore, in the coalition environment, cross-cultural encounters are occurring at all levels. Improved understanding of another’s culture should contribute to cooperation. In this era of ever-increasing contact with forces from other countries and groups—such as the Kurds—without a country, it is worth reexamining whether it would be beneficial to have a Naval War College chair with a cultural emphasis.

⁹²Ralph Peters, “The Culture of Future Conflict,” Parameters, Winter 1995-96, 26.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions and Discussion

Review of the thesis question—"Does knowledge of the opposing culture improve adaptability and survivability for a prisoner of war?"—in conjunction with the survey responses of the Desert Storm POWs, supports two major conclusions:

1. Knowledge of the culture of an enemy appears to offer survival benefits for a prisoner of war.

The degree of benefit that can be derived from cultural knowledge varies inversely with the intensity of the situation the captive is experiencing. The survey of Desert Storm POWs suggests that in highly intense or "shocking" conditions such as those experienced at the time of capture, cultural knowledge is not as useful as it becomes in less intense situations. When captives can gather their wits and settle into the long-term survival struggle, cultural knowledge becomes more valuable.

Cultural training appears to have potential as a useful supplement to survival training by improving the understanding of the motivations and methods of the captor. This understanding secondarily increases adaptability and survivability in the POW environment.

2. The value of SERE training was strongly validated by those Desert Storm POWs who had received the training.

SERE training supplies knowledge and insights concerning the “culture of captivity.” It enables POWs to function in a world that is a hybrid of their own and the captor’s culture. By firmly implanting the precepts of the Code of Conduct through arduous tests, the training provides reassurance that honorable survival is possible.

Neither SERE training, nor cultural training, nor any combination thereof can completely overcome the fear and frustration that are fundamental to the condition of captivity. A personal faith system—a “strategy [which] has to come from inside the individual”—is also required.⁹³

⁹³India, Desert Storm POW Survey response of 12 Oct 95, I-11.

APPENDIX A

The Desert Storm POW Survey

EDUCATIONAL/CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Please circle the letter next to your choice. Fill in the blanks and check boxes as applicable.

1. My highest educational level is:

- A. High school
- B. Bachelors degree
- C. Masters degree
- D. Doctoral degree
- E. Other (please indicate) _____

2. Prior to deployment in Desert Storm, my exposure to nationalities and cultures other than my own was:

- A. Extensive
- B. Moderate
- C. Minimal
- D. None

3. My cultural background is:

- A. American, without significant influence from persons of another nationality - SKIP TO QUESTION #5.
- B. American, with minor influence from another nationality.
- C. American, with major influence from another nationality.
- D. Other: _____

4. If you were influenced during your upbringing by another nationality, please indicate which one(s) by writing in the nationality and checking the relationship that applies below:

_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Father's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-family member
Nationality				
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Father's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-family member
Nationality				
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Father's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Mother's relatives	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-family member
Nationality				

5. As compared to other cultures, American culture is:

- A. Very superior
- B. Superior
- C. Neither superior nor inferior
- D. Inferior
- E. Very inferior

6. If you speak one or more foreign languages please list them and place a check by your ability level. If you do not speak a foreign language, please check the "English only" block and SKIP TO #11 on page 4.

_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Basic	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Advanced
Language			
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Basic	<input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate	<input type="checkbox"/> Advanced
Language			
		<input type="checkbox"/> English only	

7. The first language listed was learned as a result of:

- A. Contact with native speakers
- B. Formal education in grade school, high school or college
- C. Defense Language Institute training
- D. Self-study
- E. Other: _____

IF ARABIC IS YOUR ONLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE, SKIP TO #9 ON PAGE 3.

IF YOUR ONLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE WAS NOT ARABIC, SKIP TO #11 ON PAGE 4.

8. The second language listed was learned as a result of:

- A. Contact with native speakers
- B. Formal education in grade school, high school or college
- C. Defense Language Institute training
- D. Self-study
- E. Other: _____

IF YOUR SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE WAS NOT ARABIC, SKIP TO #11 ON PAGE 4.

SKIP THIS PAGE IF YOU DO NOT SPEAK ARABIC

9. Did you avoid making your knowledge of Arabic known to your captors?
- A. Yes
 - B. No → SKIP TO #11 ON PAGE 4.
10. Why did you shield your knowledge of Arabic from your captors? CIRCLE ALL RESPONSES THAT APPLY.
- A. Trained not to reveal language ability in captivity
 - B. Instinctively knew not to reveal language ability in captivity
 - C. Felt that secret knowledge would be more helpful to me or others
 - D. Felt that my knowledge could be used against me
 - E. Other: _____

SURVIVAL TRAINING/INTEREST

When answering the questions in this section, please make a distinction between "pure" survival training and Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training that includes a prisoner of war simulation. Please circle the letter next to your choice. Fill in the blanks and check boxes as applicable.

11. Please list the military survival training courses you have had such as land survival, jungle survival, or winter survival. Check **NONE** as applicable.

_____ military survival training

☐ NONE

_____ military survival training

_____ military survival training

12. Please list any civilian survival training courses you have had as a result of scouting, training for search & rescue, etc. Check **NONE** as applicable.

_____ civilian survival training

☐ NONE

_____ civilian survival training

_____ civilian survival training

13. Did you ever attend SERE training?

A. Yes → Year _____ → Location:

- ☐ Fairchild AFB, WA
☐ NAS North Island, CA
☐ NAS Brunswick, ME
☐ Other _____

B. No

14. Did you ever receive Advanced SERE training? (These are lectures taught by a Mobile Theater Team that comes to your base, deployed site or ship.)

A. Yes → Year _____

B. No

15. Did you attend any other type of training that simulated a prisoner of war or hostage experience? If YES, please list the year, course name and the sponsoring agency.

A. Yes → Year _____ Course _____ Agency _____
B. No

16. My interest in survival training topics **BEFORE** my captivity was:

A. Very high
B. High
C. Moderate
D. Low
E. Negligible

17. My interest in survival training topics **AFTER** my captivity has:

A. Increased greatly
B. Increased somewhat
C. Remained the same
D. Decreased somewhat
E. Decreased greatly

18. My interest in prisoner of war literature **BEFORE** my captivity was:

A. Very high
B. High
C. Moderate
D. Low
E. Negligible

19. My interest in prisoner of war literature **AFTER** my captivity has:

A. Increased greatly
B. Increased somewhat
C. Remained the same
D. Decreased somewhat
E. Decreased greatly

TRAINING OVERVIEW

20. If you received any of the types of training listed below, please rate the usefulness to you as a POW by checking the appropriate box. Check "not applicable" if you did not receive that type of training.

	Very useful	Useful	Of little use	Of no use	Not applicable
SERE training (land survival phase)					
SERE training (captivity phase)					
Advanced SERE training					
Military survival trng (other than SERE)					
Arabic language training					

IF ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS FELL INTO THE UNSHADED BOXES ABOVE, PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION #26 ON PAGE 8.

FOR THOSE TYPES OF TRAINING WHERE YOUR ANSWERS FELL INTO THE SHADED AREA ABOVE, PLEASE SELECT THE MAIN REASON WHY THE TRAINING YOU RECEIVED WAS OF LITTLE OR NO USE:

21. SERE training - land survival phase (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training scenarios were unrealistic
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

22. SERE training - captivity phase (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training scenarios were unrealistic
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

MAIN REASON WHY THE TRAINING WAS OF LITTLE OR NO USE:

23. Advanced SERE training (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training too detailed or obscure to be useful
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

24. Military survival training (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training scenarios were unrealistic
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

25. Arabic language training (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Few or no opportunities to keep language skills current
- B. Too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

CULTURAL TRAINING/INTEREST

26. The Arabic cultural training that I received was:

- A. Advanced
- B. Intermediate
- C. Basic
- D. None → SKIP TO #35 ON PAGE 10

27. The source(s) of my cultural training were: (CIRCLE ALL RESPONSES THAT APPLY.)

- A. Civilian course
- B. Military course
- C. Residence in the Mid-East
- D. Self-Study
- E. Other: _____

28. For the sources of training you indicated in QUESTION #27, please rate their usefulness to you as a POW by checking the appropriate box.

Arabic Cultural Training Source	Very useful	Useful	Of little use	Of no use	Not applicable
Civilian course					
Military course					
Mid-East residence					
Self-study					
Other					

IF ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS FELL INTO THE VERY USEFUL OR USEFUL COLUMNS ABOVE, PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION #34 ON PAGE 9. FOR SHADED AREA RESPONSES, CONTINUE WITH #29 AND SELECT THE MAIN REASON WHY THE TRAINING YOU RECEIVED WAS OF LITTLE OR NO USE:

29. Civilian course (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training too detailed or obscure to be useful
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

MAIN REASON WHY THE TRAINING WAS OF LITTLE OR NO USE:

30. Military course (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training too detailed or obscure to be useful
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

31. Residence in Mid-East (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Period of residence too short to be useful
- B. Country and customs too different from Iraqi culture to be useful
- C. Lived in enclave for foreign nationals and was sheltered from learning culture
- D. Lived in military compound and was sheltered from learning culture
- E. Some other reason: _____

32. Self-study (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Materials available were too detailed or obscure to be useful
- B. Materials available were too elementary to be useful
- C. Motivated for self-study, but insufficient time for in-depth work
- D. Required to self-study, but not motivated
- E. Some other reason: _____

33. Other source (Answer only if you checked a shaded box.)

- A. Training too detailed or obscure to be useful
- B. Training too elementary to be useful
- C. Material did not seem relevant to my situation at the time
- D. Trained too long ago to remember material
- E. Some other reason: _____

34. If you received any Arabic cultural training and found it to be USEFUL or VERY USEFUL to you as a POW, please comment on why this was the case.

(Continue on reverse as necessary)

35. Beside each of the statements presented below, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **Disagree (D)**, **Strongly Disagree (SD)**, or are **Undecided (U)** by placing a mark in the box that corresponds to your opinion.

	SA	A	D	SD	U
A. Knowledge of the culture of my captor would have eased the initial shock of capture.					
B. Knowledge of the culture of my captor would have allowed me to better adjust to the captive environment for the long-term.					
C. The captors' culture affects their treatment of a prisoner of war.					
D. The captors' culture affects the methods of interrogation they use.					
E. Knowledge of my captors' culture would have enabled me to obtain better treatment without comprising the Code of Conduct principles.					
F. Cultural training would have helped me to avoid making unintentional offense through verbal communication.					
G. Cultural training would have helped me to avoid making unintentional offense through gestures and other non-verbal communication.					
H. Knowledge of the captors' culture would have enabled me to resist "hard sell" interrogation (accompanied by torture or threats) more effectively.					
I. Knowledge of the captors' culture would have enabled me to resist "soft sell" interrogation (with subtle coercion) more effectively.					
J. Lack of cultural knowledge can make honorable survival as a POW more difficult.					

36. My interest in Arabic culture **BEFORE** my captivity was:

- A. Very high
- B. High
- C. Moderate
- D. Low
- E. Negligible

37. My interest in Arabic culture **AFTER** my captivity has:

- A. Increased greatly
- B. Increased somewhat
- C. Remained the same
- D. Decreased somewhat
- E. Decreased greatly

38. In a future conflict, my motivation to learn about the culture of the opposing force would be:

- A. Very high
- B. High
- C. Moderate
- D. Low
- E. Negligible

39. I was held captive for _____ days.

40. Please feel free to add further comments, if you wish.

**YOUR TIME AND EFFORT IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY ARE
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED**

APPENDIX B

Cultural Knowledge and Captivity Experiences

35. Beside each of the statements presented below, please indicate whether you **Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **Disagree (D)**, **Strongly Disagree (SD)**, or are **Undecided (U)** by placing a mark in the box that corresponds to your opinion.

	SA	A	D	SD	U
A. Knowledge of the culture of my captor would have eased the initial shock of capture.	23.5*	23.5	23.5	17.6	11.8
B. Knowledge of the culture of my captor would have allowed me to better adjust to the captive environment for the long-term.	35.3	35.3	11.8	5.9	11.8
C. The captors' culture affects their treatment of a prisoner of war.	64.7	23.5	0.0	0.0	11.8
D. The captors' culture affects the methods of interrogation they use.	58.8	29.4	0.0	5.9	5.9
E. Knowledge of my captors' culture would have enabled me to obtain better treatment without comprising the Code of Conduct principles.	17.6	11.8	35.3	17.6	17.6
F. Cultural training would have helped me to avoid making unintentional offense through verbal communication.	11.8	52.9	23.5	0.0	11.8
G. Cultural training would have helped me to avoid making unintentional offense through gestures and other non-verbal communication.	5.9	70.6	17.6	0.0	5.9
H. Knowledge of the captors' culture would have enabled me to resist "hard sell" interrogation (accompanied by torture or threats) more effectively.	5.9	29.4	35.3	5.9	23.5
I. Knowledge of the captors' culture would have enabled me to resist "soft sell" interrogation (with subtle coercion) more effectively.	5.9	41.2	29.4	0.0	23.5
J. Lack of cultural knowledge can make honorable survival as a POW more difficult.	11.8	58.8	5.9	17.6	5.9

* Values shown in table are the percentages of respondents' answers to each choice (N=17).

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